

TOWN & COUNTRY

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is the central focus of the cover. She is wearing a vibrant red, sleeveless dress adorned with sequins and intricate patterns. She is seated in a plush red chair with a gold-colored frame. Her hands are clasped together in her lap, and she is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid, deep red color, creating a rich, festive atmosphere.

DECEMBER 1994 \$3.00

All That Glitters

Sequins Set the Tone
For a Season of Celebrations

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Of the Brooch

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American
For 1994



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Design

TALENT SHOW

Meet the new kids on the building block: Ferguson Murray & Shamamian.

In six short years, the Manhattan firm of Ferguson Murray & Shamamian, Architects has gone from renovating wallet-size city apartments to recasting some of America's most impressive estates. Although the firm's three partners are loath to reveal the names of their affluent, media-shy clients, places tell part of the story: think Palm Beach; Aspen; Bedford, New York; and Litchfield County and Greenwich, Connecticut. Still in their late 30s and early 40s—mere babes, in architectural years—the partners are now making their mark with two of their most ambitious projects to date: a sprawling renovation of a 1920s oceanfront residence in Palm Beach, and Maywood, the enormous house-and-garden fantasy of New York investment banker Peter May and his wife Leni, in Bridgewater, Connecticut. "We consider Maywood a lifetime project," says Mark Ferguson.

It is a giant leap from the discreet world of decoration in which the trio forged their partnership. Trained as architects, they first met up nine years ago when all three were employed by Parish-Hadley Associates, the preeminent old-guard decorating firm. While detailing moldings and mantelpieces, they were able to observe the inner workings of outwardly grand houses and develop their own classical design repertoire. By 1988, the three were ready to try their hands at rebuilding the estates they once helped decorate, and a partnership was born. Ferguson's cohorts John Murray and Oscar Shamamian share equally in the design and marketing duties.

In its quest to evoke the grandeur of the past, Ferguson Murray & Shamamian calls on myriad building styles to satisfy the dreams of its clients. The Spanish Mediterranean Palm Beach house, for example—nearly 30,000 square feet in all, after renovation and expansion—will become an overwhelming cluster of pergolas and covered terraces, of pink guest annexes, swimming pools and palm trees: a veritable Disney fantasy of a Mediterranean palace. Designer Naomi Leff will work on the rambling interiors. "It's one of the last houses to be redone, and one of the last to be air-conditioned," jokes Ferguson.

In contrast to Palm Beach, the Maywood estate is an austere synthesis of American Greek Revival and Georgian architecture, with brick, fieldstone and wood facades. The partners began by adding a small library and a gym to an existing house. A year and a half later, they were rehired by May to tear down the original structure—leaving their addition intact—and rebuild the home in the current style. (Bunny Williams handled the décor.) The partners also landscaped the seventy-five-acre property and designed formal gardens;



Architects Oscar Shamamian, Mark Ferguson and John Murray (from left) stand before Maywood, the Litchfield County, Connecticut, house they designed for Peter and Leni May.

next will come elaborate greenhouses to cater to Mr. May's favorite hobby.

Despite the recent flood of new business, Ferguson Murray & Shamamian still gives

even the smallest projects careful nurturing. The firm has started preliminary work on a private chapel: Mark Ferguson visited a number of pre-Revolutionary originals along the East Coast before settling on the relatively simple plan, a fieldstone building with a gabled roof. The diminutive place of worship, which should cost upward of \$250,000, will forgo cutting-edge contemporary detailing for authenticity—yet another bow from the ascendant threesome to classical good taste.

NICOLAI OURUSSOFF